DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 975 RC 022 883

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TITLE	Enabling Leadership: Just Cycling Along. CRLRA Discussion Paper.
INSTITUTION	Tasmania Univ., Launceston (Australia). Center for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.
PUB DATE	2000-05-18
NOTE	9p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/discuss00.html.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Cooperation; *Community Development; Foreign Countries; Interpersonal Competence; *Leadership Styles; *Rural Development; School Community Programs; *Social Capital; *Social Networks; Strategic Planning
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; *Facilitative Leadership

ABSTRACT

Conventional notions of leadership have focused on the leader alone rather than on the situation that leaders must enable. The common threads to successful rural community development in Australia over the last few decades lie in the way the community develops its stores of social capital, which is based on trust, shared values, networks, and collective action. Models of leadership should refocus on situations that demand a leadership of enablement, rather than on any single person presumed to somehow "conduct" the leadership process from beginning to end. This refocusing provides an opportunity to include and value a wider group of people rather than just one "leader." Qualities of interactive processes that foster this leadership of enablement include building internal networks; building links between internal and external networks; building a history of shared experiences and understandings; building shared visions; building shared communication; and building each other's self-confidence. The main role of leaders under these circumstances is developing trust. Tools for community builders include relationship building, collaborative problem solving, and situational analysis. The results of situational analysis can be used to specify the leadership structure for the situation, and local solutions can be woven from the diverse and complementary threads of the overall community fabric. Power is distributed along with the leadership, not vested in one authority figure. An example describes how a community's situation defined its leadership needs during the development of a vocational skills center. (TD)

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Enabling Leadership: Just cycling along

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, a number of communities in regional areas have been successful in their efforts to halt the slide in their communities' fortunes (Editor, 1997; Falk & Harrison 1998). Consolidating and even developing a community under adverse economic circumstances is not easy, and is often viewed as pointless - the last ditch effort by desperate survivors. The common threads to success stories lie in the way the community leads the development of its stores of social capital, which is based on trust, shared values, networks and collective action. This paper discusses these two aspects of rural development – the question of leadership and the need to marshal new forms of leadership around the development of social capital to bring sectors together in times of change as communities of learners working for the greater common good.

Change and leadership

Some argue that the decades of change, improvement and reform have left many, consciously or otherwise, confused, exhausted and disillusioned (Deal, 1990). On the other hand, Drucker (1989) reminds us that 'a time for turbulence is also one of great opportunity for those who can understand, accept, and exploit the new realities. It is above all a time of opportunity for leadership (p.10).' In fact, it could be argued that understanding the role and function of leadership is one of the most important intellectual and practical tasks of this generation (Fairholm, 1998). The reason is simple. Those in our communities who take on leadership roles or functions play a major role in helping us shape our lives. Success in the new millennium, as in the past, will depend on how well leaders understand such things as their roles and functions, the leadership processes in which they are engaged and their own and their community's values and visions.

Our research (e.g., Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) shows that there are two sets of resources that leaders of the 21st Century must take account of as they interact with each other in developing the social capital of modern communities: *knowledge* and *identity* resources. The knowledge is about people and common resources that facilitate action through people's interactions. Identity is about using relevant available resources to foster people's identity in ways that promote self-confidence and a willingness to take a risk and act for the common good of their communities; in other words, to assume the mantle of leadership.

The definition of social capital used here, developed from Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) is:

> Social capital is the product of social interactions that may contribute to the social, civic or economic wellbeing of a community-of-common-purpose. The interactions draw on knowledge and identity resources and simultaneously use and build stores of social capital. The nature of the social capital depends on various qualitative and quantitative dimensions

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of the interactions in which it is produced, such as the quality of the internal-external interactions, the historicity, the reciprocity, the trust and the shared values and norms.

This definition stresses the role of interpersonal interaction as the engine of social capital. Any interaction between two people will involve the participants bringing into the conversation or discussion things they know and indicators of their identity. These two groups of resources - knowledge and identity resources - are closely related and interact with each other. For example, someone might say, 'I'm not a leader'. In some cases, this might be a statement resulting from the person's long history of 'knowledge' of their experiences, times when they have tried but not succeeded in leading others according to their own and others' criteria of success. However, the statement 'I'm not a leader' might also represent a statement about the person's identity, in the sense that they are simply not willing to 'have a go' at being a leader. Their confidence may be low when working in groups, or they may be shy. They may not have the knowledge to be able to articulate their reasons. This is not a piece of knowledge that the person has: it is an aspect of their self-perception, or identity. The person is bringing up in the conversation their identity as a 'non-leader', so reproducing their public role as a non-leader with the other.

Let us take the above example one step further. If the person with the 'non-leader' identity undergoes, for example, a further education program on self-confidence and leadership skills, they may well then have additional knowledge which affects the resources they have to draw on in the presentation of their own identities. Alternatively, the person might experience a crisis of some kind, and 'without thinking' take a leadership role. By so doing, they 'learn' something about themselves, which allows their self-perception to alter and so affects their identity formation and presentation.

What this definition and examples of social capital show is that leadership is normally distributed, dispersed and diffused rather than concentrated in one or few hands. Not only are leaders heavily dependent on followers, but also, followers can become leaders. This should shake our confidence in concepts of leadership built on individualistic and personal attributes, and cause us to think about the situation in which concepts of leadership are actually applied.

The following two scenarios each present a situation in which leadership is at issue. Each is different, and in each case, the leadership question has different dimensions.

Scenario 1: Believe it!
Here is one situation in which leadership is an issue, described in more detail in Falk and MacManamey (1999):

A newspaper's contribution to leadership in community development: Believe it!
The distribution region for this newspaper has all the symptoms of rural atrophy. High unemployment, lack of availability of jobs, high youth suicide, big industry re-locating to cheaper labour sources and a fall in infrastructure in terms of government and private facilities and services. At the heart of the trouble it was believed that the population at large had lost hope. People's 'regional self-esteem' seemed to be at an all time low. It seemed hard for people to believe that things could ever be better, yet in order to turn this tide, people needed to have hope – to believe in the possibility of positive outcomes in interventions in their futures. In these circumstances, the regional daily newspaper became interested in the economic condition of its distribution area. It had initiated several previous attempts to raise the region's awareness of the effects of its own apparent negative self-image; none seemed to result in long-term benefit. However, the leadership of the newspaper was determined that this time it would persevere, and it launched a new and invigorated campaign that they called 'Believe it!'. A partnership was forged between the newspaper and a local university research centre to conduct an 'action evaluation' of the campaign.
The newspaper had originally conceived of the campaign mainly on two fronts. One was to work closely with business and the education sector to raise confidence and help create the climate for increasing job opportunities. The second was to sponsor and support the local football team and so help raise the community spirit – and, it was hoped, the self-esteem – of the general public. However, after some meetings with the researchers, which stressed the importance of a whole-community approach to community development, the scope was widened to include all aspects of the community – community and volunteer groups, local businesses of all kinds, celebrating the successes of employment outcomes. The newspaper ran daily columns featuring success stories under the Believe it! banner. Believe it! bumper stickers proliferated. The newspaper hosted a series

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of community conferences in key locations around the region to raise awareness of the campaign and to promote activities that saw the community working together.

After nearly a year, the evaluation was completed. The outcomes showed that the campaign had been successful. A number of success stories shows how this community development measure has the capacity to work. The interesting things that did emerge from the evaluation, however, related to the increased capacity that communities gained in 'getting things done' through becoming 'learning communities' within a 'learning region'. All levels of education and training were partners, sharing in the planning and outcomes.

Community projects that had been unresolved for years were accomplished following the whole-community meetings that brought the capacities of the towns and communities together for a common purpose. Many individual businesses documented the fact that, through their involvement in Believe it!, they had accelerated their business plan faster than in their wildest dreams. The public education sector became close partners, and immediately recognised the value in working across sectors to enhance outcomes for their students and schools, especially in the area of a closer integration of the schools with their local communities. Volunteer and fund-raising groups reported some astonishing outcomes from their involvement in the campaign.

Of course, there were not all success stories, but there were no failures either. The action evaluation partnership's real value lies in the way it was able to show that *it is possible* to increase the community's confidence and level of activity, and it showed *how* this could occur in variety of ways for a variety of groups and people.

Scenario 2: Sea Change

In Scenario 2 that follows, a story is described of the way the situation of a small community defines its leadership needs.

Sea Change?

This community is typical of many. Picture a small beachside town on the eastern seaboard of Australia. The town is located at the head of a bay, with beaches and oceans nearby. The population of the town is around 2,000 in Winter but grows to maybe 8,000 in Summer through Tourism, a major industry for the region. There are two 'country' supermarkets in town, one chemist, one medical practice (there were two until a few years ago), a small hospital (under threat), a handful of specialty shops, two public utilities, three banks, two secondhand furniture outlets and two pubs. The town is lucky to retain so much business activity, as it is the centre of a much larger regional hinterland of 3,000 people, whose smaller towns have seen much more severe closures and withdrawals.

The social and economic wellbeing of the whole community depends on the supply of funding and services of various kinds. Funding and services flow to the community through several different streams, sectors, programmes and sources: education, health, medical, training, volunteer, aged care, commercial and more importantly via three tiers of government. On investigation, it is discovered that the delivery of these streams of funding and services rarely if ever intersects. In fact, 'the local experts', those in town who know everything about everything, tell us that the right hand simply does not know what the left hand is doing. There is little or no coordination or rationalisation between the sources, and the local experts know how much money, goodwill and resources are duplicated or wasted, a situation which leads to cynicism about government and a subsequent reduction of trust in civic and political processes and structures.

The town has a history of internal social and economic difficulties. It has a very low per capita income, a high proportion of welfare recipients, and a high proportion of unemployed - especially youth unemployed (36%). Its fishing fleet has been reduced. One by one, businesses closed, the community's youth had to leave in increasing numbers to access education beyond year 10 as well as further education (either TAFE or University). Health services closed their doors, several other small businesses closed, and government services stopped or shrank. More people in families took on paid work, for less hourly pay. There was less time for talk, less time for kids, less time to help out in the community. The pool of volunteers decreased. Community groups ceased or became skeletal. The older male civic and community leaders tried for a decade or more to repair the damage, to no effect. Old strategies and old-style leadership no longer worked. Nothing that had once worked seemed to work any more.

Several sets of parallel events then unfolded.

One was the proposal, supported by the State Government, for a large number of additional oyster leases to be established in the bay. The community was divided, mobilising itself into two opposing groups – for and against the development. Information about oyster leases and their consequences (economic and social) was found from other States and countries, employment figures were cited, new community groups were formed for the purpose of raising awareness and lobbying for their side of the argument. There was some resulting bitterness and anger in this small community.

A second set of parallel events was the establishment of a Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) in the town. The regional university was contacted to help conduct an industry audit of the region with a view to identifying skill gaps, local industry data bases, the industry profile, needs and future directions. The BEC worked with the local council to develop a local planning group consisting of the BEC, local council, Chamber of Commerce, education department and local industry.

A third group of activities focused on the loss at sea of three fishermen from the local fleet. Their deaths penetrated nearly every part of this small community. Their public memorial service, conducted on the foreshore, was attended by more than 2,000 people, a very large gathering, and a huge show of community bonding.

Parallel to the above activities, the local council had been considering conducting a renewed strategic planning exercise. Partly through the bitter experience of failed previous top-down initiatives, a representative of the local government, here called Bob, understood the need for such an activity to be community-driven. Bob worked hard to bring the councillors together with outside influences who could help facilitate the process of change that a community-driven planning initiative would involve. These 'outsiders' included some folk from the regional university who had been carrying out some community development research in the area, and a couple of other consultants to talk with council about streetscape design and other matters. A community development officer was appointed.

With the informed support of the council, the local government then facilitated a locally devolved community-based strategic planning process which it ensured was driven and owned by the community. Planning sessions were conducted in several satellite towns in the local government area. The council members played a background role, insisting on the community representatives being involved. The university representatives also played an informational role, setting the context for the planning process and stressing the need for 'bottom-up' planning to ensure more sustainable outcomes.

The planning processes resulted in a document summarising the process and its outcomes, but which also included provision for the next proposal to come from the BEC... The outcomes of the industry audit project provided an objective and strong basis for the BEC's collaborative partnership (now formalised in the management structure for the BEC) to develop a proposal for a local Skills Centre to be established in the town. A Skills Centre is a relatively new phenomenon. It is an initiative of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) which is the peak national policy and funding mechanism of the Commonwealth Government. A Skills Centre is set up to provide vocational education and training opportunities for youth who are either in schools but post-compulsory in age, or have left school altogether. In this case, the Skills Centre was seen as being a community initiative, a shared resource, and one which would be managed independently, but partnered with, the education authorities. This Skills Centre is also devolved to local centres outside (as well as there being a node in) the town, and Information Technology plays a large part in the learning.
The application was thoroughly prepared and checked, and was subsequently successful.

At the same time as the proposal for the Skills Centre was lodged, the staff from the regional university who had been involved in the planning processes and proposals initiated their own proposal, involving the partnership. This proposal is for an Strategic Partnerships with Industry - Research and Training (SPIRT) Scheme, one of the Australian Research Council (ARC) grant areas. It involves the re-vitalised local Tourism Industry as the key partner. The local partnership is supporting the proposal with cash and in-kind resources over a three year period, and one significant plank in the proposal is for one of the industry partners to become an industry-based researcher formalised as an Australian Postgraduate Award - Industry (APAI).

There is a new skate park in town, funding for which was raised in record time. The building of a new retirement village cluster has begun. Two new doctors have just been attracted to the town to fill the gap in the existing understaffed lone medical practice. Two new tourism facilities (including a major international eco-tourist lodge) have been approved by the Council, two new marinas, a

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paddle steamer restaurant, a new waterfront restaurant and significant extensions to the existing nursing home and hospital.

There is a new air of optimism around town, in the streets and shops, as well as in the hinterland.

A community's development cycle
Let me now illustrate the cycle of the Scenario 2 community's development over the last few years.

Conditions for a situated Enabling Leadership model
Until now, concepts of 'leadership' and models of leadership have focused on 'the leader' alone rather than on the situation that leaders must enable. I think this is a fatal flaw. The speed and nature of change as we approach the new millennium have re-focused out attention on the situations that demand a leadership of enablement, rather than on any single person presumed to somehow 'conduct' the leadership process from beginning to end. This re-focusing provides an important and new possible perspective for those concerned with leading in new times – a chance to include and value a wider group of people than where the focus is on the one 'leader'.

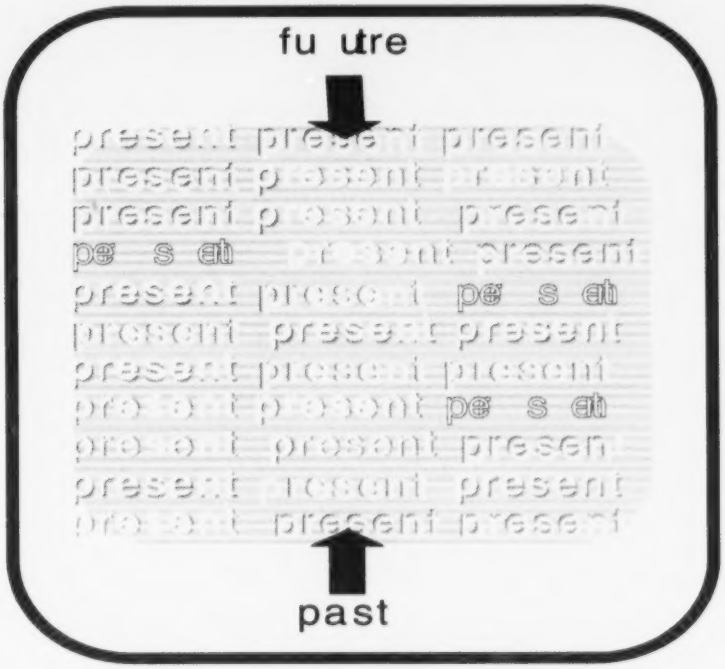
John Gardner, in his introduction to an important summary of issues and challenges facing community leadership for the 21st Century (Peirce & Johnson, 1997) highlights some of the main requirements for leadership under the new circumstances:

> What we need, and what seems to be emerging in some of our communities, is something new - networks of responsibility drawn from all segments, coming together to create a wholeness that incorporates diversity. The participants are at home with change and exhibit a measure of shared values, a sense of mutual obligation and trust. Above all, they have a sense of responsibility for the future of the whole city and region. (p. vi)

Lesson 10 from Peirce and Johnson is called 'Keep your eye on the ball'. This is, as they say, that no success is ever final. After major community events such as carnivals or fairs, regions and cities cannot afford to be complacent. The community must be kept 'toned up' to respond to opportunities and keep the community capacity bubbling along.

A situated Enabling Leadership model

What are the elements in a community that favour productive leadership situations? Here, we can be guided by a principle underlying sound social interventions, which we call the Principle of Interconnectivity. It looks like this:



The Principle of Interconnectivity is about a process of leadership and learning that attends to the crucial dimension of interconnectedness in human experience by valuing those connections and the narratives they generate. Its two elements are community connection and chronological continuity. Individual transformation and community transformation co-evolve over time, building the leadership capacity and the community as a whole.

Factors that interrupt the shared narratives of experience prolong the time required for effective outcomes, or may even render a potentially rich learning experience somewhat negative. Continuity of personnel and program is an obvious consideration in a 'project' policy environment where funding can chop in and out, sometimes leaving projects and personnel in limbo. This aspect of funding procedure risks the re-invention of human and physical capacity and infrastructure when a new program is begun. Value for money spent on one program is not maximised when its physical, human, social and learning outcomes (capacity) are not carried forward as infrastructure for subsequent use.

I am suggesting that leadership is multi-faceted and should be about a situation rather than about the characteristics of 'a person'. The precondition for 'good leadership' in the new times heralded by the above is that the leadership is not approached from a predetermined 'this is the right way to do the job' stance: the action is situated in a particular location, with particular needs and particular planned outcomes in the form of *enabling* others by connecting them to each other, to information and to their community. The situation dictates the needs, the planning and the outcomes. The situation determines the type and extent of enabling leadership that is involved. For example, the following are some of the key qualities of interactive process that foster positive learning of knowledge and about identities, and so contribute to enhanced

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networks, relationships, collective action and, therefore, leadership:

1. *Building internal networks:* Are the relevant knowledge of skills, knowledge and values present for the purpose in hand?

2. *Building links between internal and external networks:* How well are the links between the internal and external networks in the community built and maintained?

3. *Building historicity:* How effective is the building of shared experiences (including norms, values and attitudes) and understandings of personal, family, community and broader social history?

4. *Building shared visions:* How systematic, inclusive, and inclusive of knowledge and identity resources (including norms, values and attitudes) is the reconciliation of past shared experiences with the desired future scenario/s?

5. *Building shared communication:* How explicit and systematic are the communicative practices, about physical sites, rules and procedures?

6. *Building each other's self confidence and identity shifts:* How explicit and systematic are the opportunities where these interactions occur?

The role of leaders under these circumstances can be seen to be developing trust. For example, the building of networks relies for its success on building trust between the network members, a clear leadership role. Likewise, building trust between people as they share communication is fundamental to successful outcomes. It can also be seen that one outcome of the above indicators of sound process will be enhanced levels of generalised trust and commitment in all the networks of that community-of-common-purpose. In other words, trust is apparent at both specific and generalised levels, and building trust is clearly a goal of leaders of the new millennium.

...and in conclusion

Situated Enabling Leadership as relationship building across traditional barriers may at first appear to be an unnatural act. It needs to be learned. It requires constant, hard work. Tools for community builders include relationship building and collaborative problem-solving. More than this, they involve carrying out situational analyses, an extension of the now trendy Community Resource Mapping, to establish the knowledge, identity and interactional needs of the particular purpose in hand. With the results of the situational analysis, the leadership structure for that situation can be specified and, as happens with all successful community projects, relevant, local solutions can be woven from the diverse and complementary threads of the overall community fabric.

In this situation, 'leadership' is about building leadership.

The future rural regional Australia will inherit is partly of its own making. Those able to act, those able to put the heart and soul back into their communities, will have developed cooperative and enabling processes in their community. Power is distributed along with the leadership, not vested in one authority figure. Previously, the underlying question was *community for who*? In the new situation, the basic question is *community for what*? The answer to this question provides the 'roots', the stability, from which to judge which change to embrace.

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